



Dark Night of the Soul: Night of Sense; Night of Spirit

Selected Readings

1. The Night of Sense reveals the full extent of the selfishness of which we are capable. Humility is the first fruit of the bittersweet experience of this intimate kind of self-knowledge. It is the peaceful acknowledgement of our faults without the reactions of blame, shame, anger or discouragement. Violence to self is neurotic. Humility is the balance between the truth about weakness and confidence in the infinite mercy of God.
2. The Night of Sense is the delicate place on the spiritual journey where the temptation to abandon the journey is paramount. The three trials of the Night of Sense are immense favors from God. The divine light spotlights the source of the problem, which are our exaggerated programs for happiness. We cannot bring the false self to an end by ourselves; we can only allow it to die. All we have to do is consent but that is often most difficult. God then moves in and completes the great work. When all our efforts to transform ourselves have failed, we finally accept the disposition of interior peace.
3. The image of the flame in *"The Living Flame of Love"* is a symbol of energy, both physical and spiritual. Flame and fire are the same symbol. It expresses a life force. Its flames can be a destructive, consuming experience, but the destruction is often a prelude to purification and renewal. The flame in John's poem has this paradoxical nature. It speaks of a wound and its pain, but the same flame is gentle and life-giving. It burns in the center of the person and swells the heart. It separates into lamps that warm and illuminate. John asks the flame to "consummate" and "tear through the veil." The flame is a symbol for the Holy Spirit.
4. How do we understand the effects of the divinization of humanity? We remain ourselves, but infused with divine life. In this state the soul cannot make acts because the Holy Spirit makes them all. Thus all the movements of this soul are divine. The consciousness of the person is now so totally transformed that the intellect, will and memory are now God's intellect, will and memory. As the senses are purified and united with the spirit, and as the human spirit is transformed, the focus of our intentions shift. Purification of the senses brings harmony with the spiritual faculties and enables one to begin to live on the level of spirit in a truly human way.
5. When the human spirit is transformed in a deep union of love with the Spirit, motivation for our love shifts. We no longer love because the object of our love pleases us, but the motivation to love is now in God. We love without knowing why; we simply love and can do nothing but love. The soul now loves God, not through itself but through Him. I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me. (*Galatians 2:20*).

6. If we have entered a “dark” place, it is in order to reach the wellspring of a deeper life. It is an archetypal descent into the unconscious. The miraculous nature of this coming of consciousness is a graced-development in which the human participates in the panorama of divine activity of Spirit within creation. This leads to an awareness of the graciousness of God at work where human consciousness is aware of God’s project and can responsibly cooperate with grace. The dark night is contemplation. Thus is the hidden ladder. It is a process of descending and ascending, being humbled and being exalted.

7. Living Flame of Love

O Living Flame of Love that tenderly wounds my soul in its deepest center!
since now you are not oppressive, now consummate!
if it be your will, tear through the veil of this sweet encounter.

O sweet cautery, O delightful wound! O gentle hand, O delicate touch that tastes
of eternal life and pays every debt!
in killing, you changed death to life.

O lamps of fire in whose splendors the deep caverns of feeling,
once obscure and blind, now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

How gently and lovingly you wake in my heart, where in secret you dwell alone;
and in your sweet breathing, filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.

.... John of The Cross